

Notes on some Kashmir Birds

BY

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Observations were made during a brief visit to Kashmir in August/September 1969. These are compared with the data in Bates and Lowther 1952. It appears some wetland species have declined or vanished, and others more dependant on man may have increased. Several observations made by other observers around Gulmarg are confirmed.

Col. R.S.P. Bates and E.H.N. Lowther published in 1952 the results of 16 summer visits to Kashmir between 1920 and World War II and summarised the observations of earlier ornithologists such as Meinertzhagen, Osmaston and Ward *et al.* There has not been much ornithological work in Kashmir since.

Bates and Lowther (to be referred to as B & L henceforth) urged other ornithologists to publish their results and having received considerable advice from Col. Bates in my early days, I feel I owe it to him to do so. I also hope it will encourage others to do so and show that worthwhile observations can be made even on a family holiday without having to organise a major expedition.

I arrived in Kashmir on 26th August and left on 5th September 1969. In this brief time it was obviously impossible to cover a large amount of ground in detail and many places could literally only be given a casual glance. Nevertheless, half the number of species listed by B & L and almost two-thirds of those they found nesting were identified.

It was not an ideal time of year for an ornithological investigation because many summer visitors have left the Vale by mid-Sept. and only reduced numbers could still have been present and also many species which are located mainly by sound such as owls and cuckoos were silent. Also, during the breeding season most small birds are fairly evenly distributed in nesting territories in which they tend to advertise themselves, but at this time of year they band together in large mixed flocks and a forest can appear completely deserted until one of these roving bands passes through when the observer is overwhelmed for a few minutes until it moves on. The season is also too early for many high altitude species to be expected at a lower level.

B & L's observations are now between 30 and 50 years old but even then the pressure of human population was having its effect on

Whiskered Terns on the Dal Lakes and the Ibisbill (*Ibidorhyncha struthersii*) had disappeared from the Lidar valley.

I have no data for the population of Kashmir at that time but it has no doubt increased in step with that elsewhere in India, particularly in Srinagar (population 285,000 in 1961). I was told 10,000 people now live in houseboats on the Dal Lakes and saw no reason to disbelieve it.

What was once marsh and forest in the Vale has given way to rice fields and orchards. There was no sign of the well wooded area in the Sind river delta to which B & L referred.

My visit was divided into two parts: Firstly centred on Srinagar with trips in the Vale and some of the side valleys, and secondly at Gulmarg for higher altitudes.

The base for operations in Srinagar was the Palace Hotel, just outside the town to the east of Takht-i-Suleiman, or Shankar Acharya Hill. This was a fortunate choice ornithologically because it was situated in its own large garden in which most meals were taken al-fresco for minimum interruption to bird-watching. There was also a golf course sloping down to the edge of the Dal Lake. A spur of hills running out from the main rim of the Vale rose right from the back of the hotel.

Detailed maps are unobtainable and data to describe the areas visited has had to be culled from a number of sources, some of them conflicting.

Altitudes are given with the dimension in feet first to avoid the ridiculous situation of figures rounded to the nearest 1000' being quoted to 4 significant figures metrically. For approximate elevations the conversion has been taken as $1000' = 300 \text{ m}$; for precise elevations, $1000' = 304.8 \text{ m}$.

The floor of the Vale, including Srinagar, lies at about 5100' (1530 m). Apart from Srinagar itself visits were made to places in and around the Vale as follows:—

26-8-69 Takht-i-Suleiman, or Shankar Acharya Hill 6210' (2040 m) just on the edge of Srinagar. A brief visit up the new road being cut up the hill, to about 5800' (1740 m). A rather dry scrubby hillside with a pine wood on the eastern slope.

27-8-69 (a) The Mogul gardens of Chashma Shari, Nishat Bag and Shalimar Bag.

(b) By boat on the Dal Lakes, floating gardens and backwaters of Srinagar.

28-8-69 Dachigam Nullah. By car to the former hunting lodge, recently burnt down, then on foot 2 or 3 miles ($3.4\frac{1}{2} \text{ km}$). The floor of this narrow steep-sided valley lies at about 6000' (1800 m) and is well wooded with broad-leaved

trees along the banks of the nullah. This particular locality does not appear to have been worked by B & L themselves.

29-8-69 (a) A round trip of the northern part of the Vale by car taking in Manasbal, Ganderbal and Wular Lake.

(b) An evening visit to Pari Mahal. This is an overgrown Mogul ruin about 1 km east of the hotel. It is at an elevation of about 5500' (1650 m) on the lower slopes of the spur running out from the rim of the Vale.

30-8-69 The slope above Pari Mahal to the summit of the spur at about 7500' (2250 m). Mostly dense thorny scrub with scattered pine woods higher up and grassy summit ridge.

31-8-69 Up the Sind valley by car to about 2 km short of Sonamarg, elevation approx. 8500' (2550 m). About 2 hours spent in the pine woods near the mouth of Glacier Valley. The rather birdless Sind river runs through magnificent scenery which will be drastically changed when the various hydro-electric schemes are finished in a few years time.

Gulmarg was the centre for operations from 1-9-69 to 4-9-69. It is situated at about 8300' (2490 m) on the Pir Panjal mountains which rise steeply from the west side of the Vale. It is a gently undulating meadow surrounded by fir woods. From Gulmarg, fir clad slopes rise to Killenmarg at about 10,500' (3150 m). This is a rather rock strewn meadow with some extensive bushy areas near a stream. From here steep slopes lead up to the summit ridge of Aphawat at 13,592' (4143 m). The lower few hundred feet (c. 100 m) of the Aphawat slopes are covered with birch (*Betula* sp.) and rhododendron scrub.

There is a stream or nullah which rises on the slopes of Aphawat flows across Killenmarg and down through the fir woods to Gulmarg, across the meadow and leaves at the northern end through a spectacular gorge. The mouth of the gorge where the stream emerges into the Vale can be reached by a bridle path which goes through Babarishi, elevation approx. 7000' (2100 m).

The main ornithological activities were concentrated on the slopes between Gulmarg and Killenmarg along the stream, and up to about 13,200' (3960 m) on Aphawat on 2-9-69. A trip was made to the mouth of the gorge below Babarishi on 4-9-69.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

The order of the list follows that in B & L 1952 for easy comparison with that work but the nomenclature is that of Ripley 1961, with the

names in B & L given as well where these differ (ignoring small changes in spelling). Almost one-third of the Latin names have been changed which is a fair indication of just how firm and universal such names actually are.

Following the current trend in field ornithology, the list is based on species and not sub-species. The latter are almost impossible to tell apart in the field, are of doubtful validity in some cases according to different experts, and particularly in India, represent only an arbitrary segment of a cline from one extreme to the other. This has meant dropping a number of regional adjectives such as 'Indian', 'Kashmir', 'Himalayan' etc. from the English names of B & L.

Corvus macrorhynchos Jungle Crow

B & L found it common in all the well-wooded areas away from the centre of the Vale.

I found it in Dachigam Nullah and near Sonamarg. It was excessively common around Gulmarg where it has adopted all the parasitic habits of the House Crow. This is not its sole source of sustenance because I found several at Killenmarg apparently catching small lizards sunning themselves on large boulders.

Corvus splendens House Crow

B & L stated it was not particularly common even in Srinagar and had declined since 1920 but was probably increasing again.

It is now a common bird in Srinagar but is still outnumbered by the Jackdaw by a factor of at least 3 or 4. The increase suspected by B & L has obviously taken place to a substantial degree.

Corvus monedula Jackdaw

Stated by B & L to be exceedingly numerous in the towns and villages of the Vale, less so in the side valleys.

It is still the common urban crow of the Vale but may have lost ground to the House Crow in Srinagar. The increase in size and population of the town has probably offered increased opportunities to both species.

Nucifraga caryocactes Nutcracker

Large Spotted Nutcracker *N. multipunctata*

The status of this species is not clear from B & L. They say it is commonest in Kashmir compared to the rest of its range but it appears they did not have much first hand experience of it, and the Kazinag range is the only area from which they give specific records.

I found it in the fir woods just below Killenmarg and also below Babarishi. It is thus fairly common around Gulmarg between 6000 and 10,000' (1800-3000 m).

Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax or **graculus** Chough sp.

Both the Redbilled and Yellowbilled (or Alpine) species were found to be patchily distributed at high altitudes by B & L.

A pair of birds were seen circling near a precipitous crag towering over Dachigam Nullah to the north (possibly Mahadeo). Due to the more sociable nesting habit of the Yellowbilled, I am inclined to think they were Redbilled. Aphawat which is without steep crags is not to the liking of either species apparently.

Parus major Grey Tit

B & L found it comparatively common up to about 7500' (2250 m).

I came across only two birds in the Chenar trees in the mogul gardens and a few in Dachigam Nullah. It was less common than I expected.

Parus melanolophus Crested Black Tit

Lophophanes melanolophus

Stated by B & L to be widely distributed from 5000' (1500 m) to 11,000' (3,300 m).

I saw this species in a small pine wood above Pari Mahal and found it common around Gulmarg up to Killenmarg.

Parus rubidiventris Rufousbellied Crested Tit

Simla Black Tit *Lophophanes rufonuchalis*

A similar distribution to the previous species according to B & L.

I found it near Sonamarg and also around Gulmarg, often in company with the preceding species. I agree with B & L that there is not much to choose between the relative numbers of the two, at least so far as Gulmarg is concerned.

Sitta europaea Common Nuthatch

Brook's Nuthatch *S. caesia*

Found by B & L between 6500' (1950 m) and 9000' (2700 m) mainly from 7000-9000' (2100-2700 m) and say it was 'particularly numerous in the woods bordering the Wular Lake'. There are certainly no woods bordering the Wular Lake today, unless the willow (*Salix* sp.) scrub can go by that name. Land around the north shore which may once have been woodland is now mostly paddy fields and the steeper slopes are rather dry and bare. B & L statement is rather odd because Wular Lake is well below the lowest level they have given for the distribution of this species. They also say Osmaston found it less numerous than the next species around Gulmarg.

I only came across it at Gulmarg where it was seen quite frequently, usually in a mixed flock with tits etc.

Sitta leucopsis Whitecheeked Nuthatch

Generally distributed in somewhat smaller numbers than the last in forests between 7500' and 10,000' (2250-3000 m), according to B & L.

I found it only at Gulmarg where, contrary to Osmaston, it was less frequently seen than the last. It is a demonstrative species fond of exposing itself at the tops of tall trees and should be readily observable. It appears to have lost ground.

Garrulax variegatum Variegated Laughing Thrush

Negative

Trochalopteron variegatum

'Almost entirely confined to the belt between 7500' and 11,000' on the inner slopes of the Pir Panjal mountains Here it is a widespread and common bird'. B & L go on to quote Osmaston who said it was not found at Gulmarg but was not rare in the birches and rhododendrons on the slopes of Aphawat between 10,000' and 11,000' (3000-3300 m).

This habitat was searched without success on two occasions, but it is so dense a determined skulker could easily escape notice. These are generally noisy birds but may be less so after the breeding season, and they could have already dropped down to lower levels.

Garrulax lineatus Streaked Laughing Thrush

Trochalopteron lineatum

B & L found it a common bird in the undergrowth and scrub on the slopes around the edge of the Vale up to 8500' (2550 m).

I came across two birds in dense scrub above Pari Mahal and 3 or 4 in a large mixed flock in the shrubs and undergrowth in and around the garden of my chalet at Gulmarg.

A field character clearly noted on the latter birds and not mentioned in the reference books was a distinct golden yellow tinge to the primary feathers, which at first suggested they may have been the previous species, but several minutes careful observation showed they had no other significant markings except broad grey tips to the tail feathers and indicated they were undoubtedly this species. The golden yellow tinge may be a feature of fresh autumn plumage.

Hypsipetes madagascariensis Black Bulbul

Microscelis psaroides

At this time of year would only be likely to be found in the well wooded portions of the side valleys, from B & L.

This indeed was the case and I found it common in the Dachigam Nullah.

Pycnonotus leucogenys Whitecheeked Bulbul*Molpastes leucogenys*

B & L found it exceedingly common throughout the Vale and a short way up the side valleys.

I found it to be a common garden bird around Srinagar and also up Dachigam Nullah.

Certhia himalayana Himalayan Tree Creeper

B & L say it was a common bird in forests from 6500' (1950 m) upwards, most numerous in firs between 8000' and 9000' (2400-2700 m).

From this it appears Gulmarg should be an ideal place for it, and I found it a common bird there.

Troglodytes troglodytes Wren

B & L found it common in broken ground from 8000' (2400 m) to above the tree line.

The only one I saw was in low alpine vegetation at about 12,000' (3,600 m) on a rocky slope of Aphawat.

Cinclus pallasii Brown Dipper

A common bird of the side streams up to 10000' (3000 m) according to B & L.

I found it common only along the nullah between Gulmarg and Killenmarg and also where the same nullah leaves Gulmarg meadow. Despite a careful search at several likely points along the Sind river I did not find it there, or along Dachigam nullah. It is possible the birds may move to higher levels as the summer progresses.

Erithacus brunneus Bluechat

B & L say it was a common bird in dense undergrowth between 6000' and 9000' (1800-2,700 m).

It is such a renowned skulker identified mainly by voice I count myself fortunate in having good views of one on the shady path along Dachigam nullah. Possibly overlooked elsewhere.

Hodgsonius phoenicuroides Whitebellied Redstart*Hodgson's Shortwing*

A common bird of scrub between 8000 & 10,000' (2400-3000 m), according to B & L who quote Osmaston as finding it common in and above Gulmarg.

The undergrowth in the open fir woods between Gulmarg and Killenmarg appears to be to the bird's liking because several times I saw the flash of orange on the tail of the shy skulking bird as it dived into a bush.

Saxicola torquata Stonechat

B & L found it exceedingly numerous on the barer slopes round the rim of the Vale, commonly up to 8000' or 8500' (2400 or 2550 m).

This was indeed the case all the way up to the summit of the slope above Pari Mahal. It was also common in open ground in Dachigam nullah. I also found it common in the garden around the hotel. This is a habitat to which B & L do not refer. The birds had probably moved in from the dry slopes nearby. Like Osmaston, I did not encounter it at Gulmarg which is probably too lush for it.

Enicurus maculatus Spotted Forktail

Negative. It could be inferred from B & L that this is fairly common species on the side streams on the slopes around the Vale.

Despite a careful look at every opportunity at streams large and small, I never saw it. One can only conclude that it is less common than it was or that, at best, it is very local.

Chaimarrornis leucocephalus Whitecapped Redstart

A common bird of streams from 8000-12,000' (2400-3600 m) according to B & L, at least from June onwards.

It was common on the nullah between Gulmarg and Killenmarg and also at the gorge at the exit from Gulmarg meadow, I did not find it on the Sind river or Dachigam nullah, both of which would be too low for the species at the time of year.

Rhyacornis fuliginosa Plumbeous Redstart

B & L say it was numerous on every river and torrent in Kashmir up to 9000' (2700 m), but absent from the main Vale.

Apart from one on the Sind river at the narrowest part of the gorge, I found it common in the same localities as the previous species.

Erithacus pectoralis Himalayan Rubythroat

Calliope pectoralis

A bird of the slopes beyond the tree line, according to B & L, up to 13,000' (3,900 m).

A bird with typical behaviour of the genus and characteristic white supercilium and chin of the female or immature of this species was seen in a small patch of abandoned cultivation near Babarishi, approx. 7000' (2100 m). It had probably dropped down from higher up on its way to winter quarters. The bushes and boulders at Killenmarg appeared to be a likely habitat but none were seen there.

Erithacus cyanurus Redflanked Bush Robin*Ianthia cyanura*

B & L say it was common in heavier forests between 8500' and 11,000' (2550-3300 m) and quote Meinertzhagen as abounding at Gulmarg between 6400 and 8600' (1920-2580 m) in September.

I found this bird in the shrubs along the banks of the nullah between Gulmarg and Killenmarg. 5 seen in one day may be considered 'abounding' for this rather retiring species.

Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus Blueheaded Robin*Adelura caeruleocephala*

A rare bird of rocky hillsides between 9000 and 11,000' (2700-3300 m) according to B & L.

It was thus surprising to find a female or bird of the year skulking in a flowerbed in the garden of my chalet at Gulmarg one day. The pale eye ring was a very distinct feature in the field.

Turdus unicolor Tickell's Thrush

I found it a common bird of gardens and lawns around Srinagar and it had a particular liking for fallen fruit in the Mogul gardens. It was also present in Dachigam nullah. This does not differ from what one would have expected from B & L.

Turdus viscivorus Mistle Thrush*Arceuthornis viscivorus*

'Not particularly common . . . distributed from 7000' (2100 m) upwards.' B & L.

I saw a flock of six at Killenmarg flying from the birches to the fir woods lower down. This is in accordance with B & L on the birds' post-breeding season behaviour.

Monticola cinclorhynchus Blueheaded Rock Thrush

B & L found it not uncommon in well wooded areas from 6000-9000' (1800-2700 m).

I only found it in Dachigam nullah, near the former hunting lodge.

Monticola solitarius Blue Rock Thrush

'Not uncommon on treeless and stony slopes, more numerous between 5000' and 6000' (1500-1800 m), from B & L.

I did not examine the slopes around Wular Lake which are supposed to be its headquarters, but did find it on the Takht (Shankar Acharya Hill) where B & L said it ought to be.

Myophonus caeruleus Whistling Thrush

According to B & L, widely distributed up to 10,000' (3000 m) but absent from the centre of the Vale.

I found this bird quite common along the nullah between Gulmarg and Killenmarg.

Prunella strophhiata Rufousbreasted Accentor

Jerdons Accentor

‘Very numerous at high elevations throughout the area . . . down to as low as 8000’.’ (2400 m), from B & L.

I found one at the summit of the slope above Pari Mahal c. 7500’ (2250 m), one in bushes at Killenmarg 10,500’ (3150 m) one in a mixed flock near by chalet at Gulmarg 8300’ (2490 m) and a possible, though it seemed darker than others of this species, at about 12,000’ (3600 m) on Aphawat. The view was too brief to be certain whether it was this or another species. I did not find it as common as B & L made out, but it appears to extend to lower levels after the breeding season.

Muscicapa sibirica Sooty Flycatcher

Hemicheldion sibirica

B & L found it widely distributed in forests from 7000-11,000’ (2100-3300 m), its stronghold is between 8000-10,000’ (2400-3000 m).

It was certainly very common around and above Gulmarg, but I also found it in Dachigam nullah and even in gardens at the edge of the Dal Lake, so that some were already on their way to winter quarters.

Muscicapa subrubra Kashmir Redbreasted Flycatcher

Siphia hyperythra

Ripley considers this a subspecies of Redbreasted Flycatcher *M. parva subrubra* but I follow B & L and Voous in considering it a separate species. It has a distinctive male breeding plumage, distinct breeding and wintering area and yet migrates through areas occupied by other forms.

B & L found it fairly common in well wooded areas up to 7500’ (2250 m).

I found it in the pine wood on the Takht and in Dachigam nullah which agrees with this. The males were still in summer plumage, yet B & L say they leave for winter quarters in September.

Muscicapa leucomelanura Slaty Blue Flycatcher

Muscicapula tricolor

According to B & L, a common bird in forests up to 10,000’ (3000 m) outside the rim of the Vale, particularly numerous between 6500 and 9000’ (1950-2700 m).

I came across it once in Dachigam nullah and occasionally at Gulmarg. This is apparently less common than B & L indicated, but it is very skulking for a flycatcher.

Muscicapa superciliaris Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher*Muscicapula superciliaris*

B & L found it from 6000' (1800 m) to almost 10,000' (3000 m) and commonest at 7000 or 8000' (2100 or 2400 m).

I saw it once only, in Dachigam nullah. It is possible the birds were already moving out to winter quarters.

Muscicapa ruficauda Rufoustailed Flycatcher*Alseonax ruficaudus*

Widely distributed in forests up to 9000 or 10,000' (2700 or 3000 m), a most numerous bird in the lower portions of the side valleys. In fact, B & L go on to say it was without doubt the commonest flycatcher at lower and medium elevations.

I cannot agree with this, because I only saw it once, again in Dachigam nullah. It seems likely the species is an early migrant and the majority had already gone.

Terpsiphone paradisi Paradise Flycatcher

Common in the summer months in the main Vale. Few pairs penetrate the lower side valleys, from B & L.

This species becomes very scarce in West Bengal after the end of August and must also leave Kashmir at about the same time because once again, Dachigam nullah produced my only record.

Lanius shach Rufousbacked Shrike

Even though B & L say it begins to leave the Vale in September, I still found it numerous in all habitats; gardens, paddy fields or the lower thorny slopes, and also Dachigam nullah.

Pericocotus brevirostris Shortbilled Minivet

B & L found it to be a bird of pines from 3000-10,000' (900-3000 m), perhaps commonest at 6000' up to 8000' (1800-2400 m).

My only record of this species was a pair in Dachigam nullah in deciduous trees. Like most of the flycatchers, the rest had probably already left for winter quarters.

Dicrurus leucophaeus Grey Drongo

B & L say it occurred in and around the Vale but was not particularly numerous.

It either leaves for its winter quarters early or is even less common than it was, because I came across it only in Dachigam nullah.

Acrocephalus stentoreus Indian Great Reed Warbler

In B & L's day it occurred in very large numbers on the Dal Lake, amongst other places.

I saw only 4 birds during 2 or 3 hours on the Dal Lake and on a couple of occasions elsewhere in roadside reedbeds. The increased commercialisation of the Lake has obviously not been to its liking, even allowing for the fact that my visit was well towards the end of its breeding season.

Bradypterus major Largebilled Bush Warbler

Locally common between 8000 and 10,000' (2400-3000 m), according to B & L.

I came across it only once, in bushes beside the nullah above Gulmarg.

Sylvia althaea Hume's Lesser Whitethroat

B & L found it common on barer hillsides up to 8000' (2400 m).

I found it common on the thorny slopes above Pari Mahal and also in Dachigam.

I found it impossible to see any difference, even in habits and habitat from the allegedly different species of Britain and Europe, *S. curruca*, and would be inclined to follow Williamson (1964) in considering them one species.

Phylloscopus affinis Tickell's Leaf Warbler

Distributed generally above the tree line from 10,500' to 15,000' (3150-4500 m), according to B & L.

I found several birds in the birch scrub on the slopes of Aphawat above Killenmarg, but could not be certain that any had dropped down to join the mixed flocks of warblers, tits etc. around Gulmarg. (I am always thankful that I took with me Williamson's work (1962) on the identification of phylloscopi. The task of separating the species would have been impossible without it. Even then it was difficult enough and many individuals went unidentified).

Phylloscopus tytleri Tytler's Leaf Warbler

B & L say it was found throughout the pine and fir woods but was not particularly common.

I came across singularly nondescript leaf warblers assumed to be this species occasionally around Gulmarg and also in Dachigam nullah. In the latter locality the birds must have come down from the pine woods on the steep slopes above. (Both Plain Leaf Warbler *P. neglectus* and Mountain Chiffchaff *P. (collybita) sindianus* are possible but much less likely, though the latter could be migrating through Dachigam at that time of year).

Phylloscopus proregulus Pallas's Leaf Warbler

Ticehurst's Willow Warbler (B & L called all *phylloscopi* 'willow-warblers'). According to B & L, fairly common from 7000–10,000' (2100–3000 m) in fir woods.

I found this species around Gulmarg, more particularly along the nullah up to Killenmarg.

Phylloscopus inornatus Yellowbrowed Warbler

A common bird, particularly in silver firs from 7500' (2250 m) to the tree limit, according to B & L.

I certainly found it common in and above Gulmarg, and along with *P. occipitalis* was the most numerous of warblers in the mixed hunting parties.

Phylloscopus magnirostris Largebilled Leaf Warbler

B & L found it widely distributed between 7000 and 10,000' (2100–3000 m) generally along banks of streams through forests.

I encountered this bird twice; once in Dachigam nullah (where it was recorded by Ward) and once at Gulmarg in a large mixed flock.

Phylloscopus occipitalis Large Crowned Leaf Warbler

B & L say it was surprisingly common in all types of forest, most numerous between 6000 and 8000' (1800–2400 m).

Despite the fact that they go on to say that its dispersal begins in July and it leaves by September, I found it quite common around Gulmarg (see Yellowbrowed Warbler). It must have been less numerous and widespread than B & L indicated, so numbers must have already left.

Cettia fortipes Strongfooted Bush Warbler**Homochlamys pallidus** Pale Bush Warbler.

B & L found it from 3000–8000' (900–2400 m) on the slopes around the side of the Vale and up the side valleys.

I came across it in the undergrowth in Dachigam and also in the undergrowth of a pine wood near the top of the slope above Pari Mahal.

Regulus regulus Goldcrest

B & L imply that this species was rare and only found in small numbers and Osmaston is quoted as seeing it at Gulmarg.

I found almost every hunting party of small insectivorous birds around Gulmarg contained a pair or two of this species. It appears to have increased, at least locally, at Gulmarg. (In Europe it is known to suffer badly in particularly hard winters and an investigation of the weather regime may be a useful enquiry).

Oriolus oriolus Golden Oriole

Common in the Vale, especially groves and orchards, from B & L.

My visit was almost at the end of their stay (they are quoted as leaving by 20th Sept.) but I found two in Orchards near the hotel and in Dachigam nullah.

Sturnus vulgaris Starling

According to B & L, a common summer visitor to the Vale which leaves in August and September.

I found this species only in and around Srinagar and noted it was vastly outnumbered by the Common Myna. Unless the Starling is very much more numerous at the height of the season it must have lost ground.

Acridotheres tristis Common Myna

B & L say it was common in the Vale.

I found it very common in and around Srinagar. Both it and the Starling are parasites of man and compete for nest sites and the former has the advantage of being resident. It has probably gained at the expense of the Starling.

Mycerobas icteroides Black and Yellow Grosbeak

Perrisospiza icteroides

Evenly distributed from 6000–10,000' (1800–3000 m) with vertical movement in winter, according to B & L.

A flock of about 15 near Babarishi and a single bird at the head of gorge where the nullah leaves Gulmarg meadow were my only records. The forests above Gulmarg were not to its liking apparently, unless the downward winter movement had already begun.

Carpodacus rhodochrus Pinkbrowed Rosefinch

Propasser rhodochrus

B & L imply that it was the most widespread of the three species of rosefinch which breed in Kashmir and it was generally distributed between 9000 and 12,000' (2700–3600 m).

A party of 5 rosefinches with completely pink underparts which flew over the birch woods above Killenmarg must have been this species.

Carpodacus erythrinus Common Rosefinch

Hodgson's Rosefinch

B & L say it was not uncommon above 8500' or 9000' (2550 or 2700 m) but could trace no records for the Pir Panjal mountains.

I am pleased to report there now is one. A single male rosefinch in a large mixed party near the garden of my chalet at Gulmarg was

viewed well and closely and I could find no reason for identifying it as anything other than this species. One seen less well in the scrub at Killenmarg could not be positively identified. I also came across a small party in the Sind river and a few in Dachigam nullah.

Carduelis carduelis Goldfinch

C. caniceps

Obviously a common bird in B & L's day from the Vale to 11,000' (3300 m) and the situation has not changed since, because I found it in gardens near the Dal Lake, up the Sind river, the steep slopes near Babarishi and at Gulmarg.

Callacanthus burtoni Redbrowed Finch

B & L say it was a bird of fir forests from 7500 to 10,000' (2250-3000 m) and gave Gulmarg as one of its strongholds.

It was thus surprising that I only saw it once at Gulmarg a solitary bird at that, in a mixed flock. It must have decreased.

Carduelis spinoides Himalayan Greenfinch

Hypacanthus spinoides

Very local according to B & L who gave the Sind valley and Gulmarg as two favoured localities, where I found it in both places.

Passer domesticus House Sparrow

I can add little to B & L's 'Excessively numerous in the towns and villages of the Vale'. With increasing urbanisation of Srinagar it has no doubt become more numerous still.

Passer rutilans Cinnamon Tree Sparrow

B & L say it was found all round the Vale from 6000-9000' (1800-2700 m) and was numerous at Gulmarg.

I certainly found it common at Gulmarg with a flock of 50 on occasion, but not elsewhere.

Leucosticte nemoricola Hodgson's Mountain Finch

Fringilauda nemoricola Stoliczka's Mountain Finch

Abnormally common above the tree line from 11,000' (3300 m) to almost 14,000' (4200 m), according to B & L.

This must be a relative term because bird life generally is few and far between on high, bare mountains. However, I came across a flock of 50-60 drinking and bathing in a small stream at nearly 13,000' (3900 m) on Aphawat.

Emberiza fucata Greyheaded Bunting

Not common but well dispersed round the rim of the Vale, and the Takht was quoted as a habitat by B & L. They also said it was scarce and found only up to 7000' (2100 m).

I found this bird on the lower slopes around the Pari Mahal in association with Rock Buntings, and also in Dachigam nullah near the former hunting lodge. I did not identify either this or the next species for certain on the Takht. It is possible the making of the new road may have caused too much disturbance.

There is something peculiar about what is alleged to be the colour illustration of this species on plate III in B & L. It has little resemblance to the description in the text but is a good likeness of Cretzmar's Bunting *E. caesia* or could even pass as an Ortolan Bunting *E. hortulana* but certainly not the species it is supposed to be.

Emberiza stewarti Whitecapped Bunting

B & L say it was common around the rim of the Vale but was found only up to 6000' (1800 m), and was also found on the Takht.

Apart from adult males, the species is not readily distinguished from the previous one and may have been overlooked. I saw it only once; a small party (family group?) on the lawn of the lodge in Dachigam. The grassy, boulder strewn hillside above appeared to be an ideal habitat.

Emberiza cia Rock Bunting

Meadow Bunting

Numerous and widespread, according to B & L, from 6000' to 10,000' (1800-3000 m)

I found it all the way up the slope from the Pari Mahal upwards. It was most numerous in the open pine clumps around 7000' (2100 m). A bunting seen too briefly to identify at Gulmarg was probably this species.

Delichon urbica House Martin

The status of this bird appears to be a few high altitude colonies between 9000 and 12,000' (2700-3600 m), if B & L are interpreted correctly.

There were several flying about the precipitous cliff face which towers over the road at the narrowest part of the Sind river gorge on the way to Sonamarg. This looked a suitable nest site but is well below B & L's lower limit. It would be worth investigating in the breeding season. I also found some in a large mixed flock of hirundines apparently migrating down Dachigam nullah.

Hirundo rustica Swallow

Obviously a very common bird in the Vale from what B & L say about it.

I found this bird commonest in flocks around the barer hills such as the Takht and the summit above Pari Mahal. There was also a large number apparently migrating down Dachigam nullah.

Motacilla alba Pied Wagtail

Very numerous in the main Vale, according to B & L and ascending the side valleys to 10,000' (3000 m).

Two birds on a shingle bank in the lower Sind river were the only ones away from the Vale, where it was a bird of lawns and gardens around the Dal Lakes. Less numerous than B & L found but the winter exodus could have already begun.

Motacilla caspica Grey Wagtail*M. cinerea*

On all streams outside the Vale up to 13,000' (3900 m), from B & L.

This was also my experience and I found it on most streams visited except the Sind river e.g. Dachigam nullah, the stream above and below Gulmarg and the mouth of the gorge below Babarishi.

Anthus pelopus Hodgson's Pipit*A. roseatus*

B & L say this was the common pipit above the tree line and I therefore presume that a pair of pipits flying overhead at Killenmarg were this species. Tree Pipit *A. trivialis* was also possible in this habitat, but much less likely as B & L had no record of it for the Pir Panjal mountains.

Alauda gulgula Eastern Skylark

Negative

I never consciously saw this bird which was very common and widespread according to B & L. Admittedly I did not examine any typical habitat and it would be very inconspicuous outside the breeding season.

Zosterops palpebrosa White-eye

B & L imply that it was irregular and uncommon but I found a small number in Dachigam nullah.

Picus squamatus Scalybellied Green Woodpecker

B & L say it was found from 4500' to 10,000' (1350-3000 m) but was not particularly common.

I saw only one, just below Killenmarg which is right at the top of its range

Dendrocopus himalayensis Himalayan Pied Woodpecker

Dryobates himalayensis

Widely distributed from 6500' to 10,000' (1950-3000 m), from B & L.

I agree with B & L that it is the commonest of Kashmir's woodpeckers and I saw two in Dachigam and it was quite common at Gulmarg, often climbing up the walls of the wooden houses.

Dendrocopus auriceps Brownfronted Pied Woodpecker

Dryobates brunifrons

Not very common and found only in the Vale, according to B & L.

The only one I saw flew over the hotel lawn while I was having breakfast.

Psittacula himalayana Slatyheaded Parakeet

B & L say it was almost entirely confined to the Deodar forests to the north of the Wular Lake in the breeding season, but raided orchards later in the year.

From the above, it was one of the major surprises of the trip to find a flock of 9 or 10 mostly immatures, feeding on fruit in the Mogul gardens. On another occasion, a flock was seen flying westward across the Dal Lake in the evening. There is no mention in B & L of the birds having been recorded in Srinagar and these observations appear to indicate a new development.

Coracius garrulus European Roller

B & L found its stronghold to be the main Vale with a penetration of the larger side valleys and quote Meinertzhagen who found only a few left round Srinagar in September.

I did not find any in the immediate environs of Srinagar but it was thinly distributed in the northern part of the Vale towards the Wular Lake and up the lower Sind valley. Apart from these there was a single bird on the hillside near Babarishi.

Merops apiaster European Bee-eater

'Confined to the main Vale and the lowest reaches of the side valleys . . . leaving in September' B & L.

In behaviour and occurrence it was markedly similar to the Swallow. Flocks were flying round the Takht, the summit of the slope above Pari Mahal and in Dachigam nullah.

Alcedo atthis Common Kingfisher

B & L's statement that it was exceedingly common in the Vale is equally true today.

Its numbers around Srinagar and the Dal Lake have to be seen to be believed, whether in murky backwaters or along the parapet of the main road along the south and SW shore where there was a bird every 20 or 30 m. Some birds still seemed to be nesting high on the Takht.

Oddly enough I had no definite record of the Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* which B & L say was also common. However, it appears to prefer quieter waters which I did not investigate.

Apus melba Alpine Swift

The status of this species is not very clear from B & L but it appeared to be spasmodic and local.

I saw flocks in the upper Sind valley at the mouth of Nichnai nullah just short of Sonamarg, over Killenmarg and near Babarishi.

Apus apus Swift

Micropus apus Eastern Swift

‘Numerous and widespread . . . usually high up the more precipitous and rocky mountain sides’ B & L.

A group with Alpine Swifts over Killenmarg was my only record.

Gyps himalayensis Himalayan Griffon Vulture

B & L say it was common from the lowest to the highest elevations but absent from the Vale.

I saw it regularly at Gulmarg and there was a pair circling round a high crag above Dachigam (see Chough) and a single bird near Babarishi. The highest of these was at Killenmarg, 11,000’ (3300 m)

Neophron percnopterus Egyptian Vulture

Large White Scavenger Vulture

B & L say it was widespread but not common and that it occurred on the Takht.

I saw 2 regularly round the Takht and 2 at the gorge below Babarishi.

Gypaetus barbatus Bearded Vulture

Widely distributed above the tree line according to B & L, but I only saw it once, gliding near the summit of Aphawat.

Falco subbuteo Hobby

B & L found it widespread in woodlands from the Vale to the tree line but I came across it only at Gulmarg where one was seen several times.

Falco tinnunculus Kestrel

B & L say it was widespread throughout the area and was commoner than the Hobby.

I saw it only near Sonamarg and at Gulmarg.

Hieraetus pennatus Booted Eagle

B & L appear to be uncertain of its status but suggest it was not uncommon. The Takht and Sind valley are quoted as two localities.

I saw a bird over Nishat Bagh and probably the same one several times over the hotel, another near Sonamarg and two at the mouth of the gorge below Babarishi. From this it appears to be well distributed at lower elevations around the Vale and up the side valleys.

Haliaeetus leucoryphus Pallas's Fishing Eagle Negative

According to B & L it was a feature of the Vale and was almost common around Wular Lake.

I regret to say I never saw it and can only conclude that the increased disturbance has been too much for it and it occurs no longer, unless it holds on in some of the more secluded lakes.

Milvus migrans Black Kite

Blackeared Kite

I prefer the English name of the typical race to avoid the tiresome variations attributed to other races.

B & L found it common in the Vale and the lower reaches of the side valleys and say it wandered to higher levels without giving a limit.

It was exceedingly numerous in and around Srinagar and elsewhere in the Vale and a flock of 50-100 kept a close eye on the hotel rubbish dump. There were also some at Gulmarg, round the pony stand mainly.

Buteo rufinus Longlegged Buzzard

Not uncommon from the Vale to 13,000' (3900 m) according to B & L.

I saw one near Wular Lake (a locality quoted by B & L) and 2 birds in a gully on the lower slopes of Aphawat at about 11,000' (3300 m). These could have been direct descendants of birds found nesting in a big fir 'above Gulmarg' by Osmaston.

Columba livia Blue Rock Pigeon

B & L say it was not uncommon in the Vale but preferring the side valleys and gorges.

As anywhere else, feral pigeons abound in Kashmir and the only apparently genuine wild birds were two in the gorge below Babarishi.

Streptopelia orientalis Rufous Turtle Dove

The status given it by B & L remains valid today. It is *the* dove of all fir woods outside the Vale and was very common around Gulmarg up to the limit of the fir woods, approx. 10,000' (3000 m).

Streptopelia decaocto Collared Turtle Dove
Ring Dove

This dove remains the common bird of gardens and open country around Srinagar as it was in B & L's day.

Alectoris chukar Chukor

Particularly common on the barer rocky hillsides around the northern and western rims of the main Vale, according to B & L.

I flushed a covey from the ruins of Pari Mahal and judging by the number of calls from the adjacent hillsides it was common all round.

Tetraogallus himalayensis Himalayan Snow Cock

B & L say it occurred on the Pir Panjal and quote Osmaston as finding it above Gulmarg, at 12,000' (3600 m).

I found a single bird at about 13,000' (3900 m) on Aphawat. It was in very broken ground and there could have been more out of sight.

Gallinula chlorops Moorhen

Common on marshes in the Vale according to B & L.

A pair with young in the backwaters of the Dal Lake was my only record. It presumably survives in greater numbers on the more secluded lakes.

Hydrophasianus chirurgus Pheasant-tailed Jacana Negative

B & L say it was common on the marshes of the Vale and that it could not be missed during a trip on the Dal Lakes.

This is another species which must have succumbed to increased human population and disturbance because I never saw it.

Chlidonias hybrida Whiskered Tern

Even in B & L's day it was greatly reduced on the Dal Lake due to human predation and disturbance, but had retired to more secluded waters.

I found a small party of 5 or 6 hunting regularly over the Dal Lake and about 15 over Wular Lake. This was rather late in their season because Meinertzhagen found that they all left by 21st Sept.

Vanellus indicus Redwattled Lapwing

Lobivanellus indicus

B & L say it occurred in the Vale but was commonest on islands in the lower reaches of the side rivers.

It was in just such a locality in the Sind river that I saw my only 2 birds.

Ardea cinerea Grey Heron

Widely spread and comparatively common in the Vale, according to B & L.

Only two sightings, one near Sopor, Wular Lake and the other over Srinagar itself of such a large and conspicuous bird can only indicate a severe decline in numbers.

Nycticorax nycticorax Night Heron

Fairly plentiful round the larger jheels from the vicinity of Srinagar to Wular Lake, according to B & L.

Two flying over Srinagar one evening was my only record, but this crepuscular bird could be overlooked. It does not appear to object to disturbance because it has become quite urbanised in the Alipore area of Calcutta, and could still be maintaining its numbers.

Ixobrychus minutus Little Bittern

B & L imply that it was common in all reed beds in the Vale, even on the Dal Lake.

About four seen in 2 hours in the reedy backwaters of the Dal Lake, and on other occasions at marshy edges, indicates it was still present but less common than it was.

Aythya nyroca White-eyed Pochard

Aythya rufa

Distributed in some numbers on all the jheels which have some cover, according to B & L.

A single bird on Manasbal lake was the only record of this, or any other, duck.

Podiceps ruficollis Little Grebe

Very common on all the lakes and marshes of the Vale, from B & L

The most frequently seen water bird on the Dal Lake, but even then, only 6 was far from numerous. This must indicate a considerable decline in numbers at this place at least.

SUPPLEMENT

B & L included a number of species in a supplement for which they had no records themselves or no definite breeding records for the area. Birds on this list which were seen by me are :—

Certhia familiaris Tree Creeper

Hodgson's Tree Creeper

B & L did not appear to have much first hand experience of this species and had difficulty separating it from the Himalayan Tree Creeper. Osmaston and Ward found it at Gulmarg.

This species was identified for certain several times at Gulmarg being satisfactorily separated from Himalayan Tree Creeper although a number of *Certhia* sp. remained indeterminate. It may be locally common at Gulmarg, or on the Pir Panjal generally.

Seicercus xanthoschistos Greyheaded Flycatcher-Warbler

Osmaston is quoted as saying it doubtless breeds in Dachigam Nullah. The only bird I saw was in this locality.

Prinia criniger Brown Hill Warbler*Suya criniger*

This identification is somewhat doubtful because the bird did not have the characteristic long tail of this species. However it is possible the bird was in moult at this time of year. Apart from this, the size, field characters, behaviour and habitat all match that of Brown Hill Warbler. Other possibilities are even less likely.

A small brown nondescript bird heavily streaked with black above but devoid of other features was watched at very close quarters for a couple of minutes as it crept about on the ground amongst the stems of tall growing weeds in a patch on the edge of a fir forest near Sonamarg.

B & L found this species up to 5400' (1620 m) in the Kishenganga valley and up the Jhelum road, so this would be 3000' (900 m) higher than its haunts elsewhere but Sálím Ali (1949) gives it up to 7000' (2100 m).

There is a small possibility it was a species of accentor *Prunella* sp. but it did not have the conspicuous supercillium of *strophilata* and it was not *colluris*. B & L give no records of any other species in Kashmir, but Ripley (1961) indicates that the Altai Accentor *P. himalayana* could occur and also the Brown Accentor *P. fulvescens* and Blackthroated Accentor *P. atrogularis* in winter.

Riparia rupestris Crag Martin

Two with other hirundines in Dachigam nullah, probably on passage.

Aegypius monachus Cinereous Vulture

A very dark vulture with the characteristic wedge-shaped tail of this species sailed low overhead at Gulmarg.

In the above list, negative records have been given only for those species which, firstly, were found by B & L to be so common as very unlikely to be missed, and secondly those species for which a particular search was made in a quoted area or habitat. Species which B & L found to be rare or local and which I was unlikely to come across have not been mentioned.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The small number of localities which could be visited, even briefly, in the short time available obviously means it is impossible to give a precise picture of the present status of every species recorded by B & L. Furthermore, much of the northern part of the area covered by them is now inaccessible across the cease-fire line. Ornithologically, the picture is further confused by the departure of summer visitors. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that a number of wetland species have greatly declined or even disappeared altogether. Unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to visit any of the protected waters such as Hokra Jeel where the situation ought to be better. Other observers may wish to check this. More by inference than evidence, the common urban species of much of lowland India have probably increased around Srinagar. Most old records for the Gulmarg area are confirmed, except for the absence of Variegated Laughing Thrush, and one has been added; Common Rosefinch. Cinereous Vulture may also be new.

A small passerine of doubtful identity near Sonamarg offers some intriguing possibilities.

Kashmir with its large area and relatively small population has only one wild life sanctuary at present in Upper and Lower Dachigam and in view of the drastic reduction in the more spectacular high altitude fauna found by the World Wildlife Fund in West Pakistan, there is scope for more. (Could the absence of a record of any species of pheasant be due to excessive hunting?). From the point of view of avifauna and for accessibility for people to observe it, Gulmarg area has much to recommend it.

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